

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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FM AMCONSUL SYDNEY

TO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 5586

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E.O.11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOU, AS

SUBJ: NSW BY-ELECTIONS

REF: SYDNEY 1475

1. WHEREAS LABOR IS CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC RE CHANCES TO WIN COOGEE, LIBERAL PARTY GENERAL SECRETARY CARLETON IS CORRESPONDINGLY PESSIMISTIC. LIBERAL PERFORMANCE IN THIS DISTRICT IN LAST MAY FEDERAL ELECTION WAS FOUR PER CENT BELOW THE NOVEMBER STATE ELECTION IN WHICH LIBS WON COOGEE BY EIGHT VOTES. MOREOVER, SAYS CARLETON, THE "IMAGE OF NSW STATE GOVT IS LOW BECAUSE OF VARIOUS SCANDALS SUCH AS LAND SPECULATION. RETIRING PREMIER ASKIN IS NO LONGER AN ASSET AND HE IS STAYING OUT OF COOGEE TO LEAVE CLEAR FIELD TO HIS PROBABLY SUCCESSOR, ERIC WILLIS.

2. CARLETON WOULD AGREE WITH LABOR LEADER WRAN THAT DEVELOPMENTS ON FEDERAL SCENE WILL CAUSE TIME TO WORK AGAINST LABOR - BUT NOT RPT NOT SOON ENOUGH TO SAVE COOGEE FOR LIBERALS ON JULY 20. THERE ARE MANY BAD FORECASTS OF HIGHER PRICES, TAXES, INTEREST, UNEMPLOYMENT, BUT THEY ARE STILL FORECASTS WHICH DO NOT YET "BITE DEEPLY" AND ARE TEMPORARILY OFFSET BY HEAVY WAGE INCREASES ALL AROUND. ON BALANCE, CARLETON THINKS LIBS

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WILL LOSE COOGEE BUT THAT IT IS TOO SOON AFTER THE GENERAL

ELECTION TO BE A HARBINGER. HE IS MORE CONCERNED OVER DEPLETION OF LIBERAL PARTY BANK ACCOUNT AND THREAT OF LEGISLATION REQUIRING PUBLICATION OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO PARTIES.

3. VIEWS OF GENSECY NSW LABOR PARTY CAHILL DOVETAIL WITH FOREGOING. ALP HAS WORKED HARD, SPENT \$40,000, AND HE BELIEVES LABOR WILL WIN "PROVIDED ME MATES IN CANBERRA DON'T MUCK IT UP". HE SAYS RECENT INCREASES IN BANK INTEREST AND POSTAL RATES ARE UNPOPULAR AND IS HOLDING BREATH IN HOPE NOTHING NEW AND UNTOWARD COMES OUT OF CANBERRA.

4. CAHILL SAYS ALP CAN'T WIN GOULBOURN WHICH WILL BE RETAKEN BY COUNTRY PARTY CANDIDATE WHO HELD IT BEFORE AND RESIGNED TO CONTEST FEDERAL SEAT EDEN-MONARO WHICH HE NARROWLY LOST TO ALP INCUMBENT IN MAY FEDERAL ELECTION. BOTH CAHILL AND CARLETON THINK LABOR NEVERTHELESS WILL IMPROVE ITS PERFORMANCE OVER LAST NOVEMBER ELECTION WHEN LABOR LOST BY 7,000. CAHILL BELIEVES IF LABOR REDUCED ITS MARGIN OF DEFEAT TO ABOUT 1,000, THAT WOULD BE SIGNIFICANT OMEN.

COMMENT: I BELIEVE IT WOULD BE DANGEROUS TO ASCRIBE TOO MUCH NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE TO THESE TWO BY-ELECTIONS FOR ALL THE REASONS SUGGESTED ABOVE, ALTHOUGH QUITE CLEARLY THERE WILL BE A PSYCHOLOGICAL DIVIDEND WHICH EITHER PARTY WILL TRY TO EXPLOIT IF IT WINS COOGEE. PERHAPS MORE SIGNIFICANT WILL BE EFFECT ON THE PERSONAL POLITICAL IMAGES OF ERIC WILLIS AND NEVILLE WRAN, WHO ARE FOR THE FIRST TIME LEADING THE LIBERAL AND LABOR PARTIES IN AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN.

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